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SUBJECT: RWANDAN CHIEF OF DEFENSE BACKS U.S. REGIONAL
INTEGRATION EFFORTS, FLAGS IMPORTANCE OF GOR-DRC TIES

Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 b,d.

¶1. (C) Summary: In a one-on-one meeting with Rwandan Chief of Defense General James Kabarebe November 17, Ambassador hailed the arrival of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) first post-genocide Ambassador, Norbert Nkulu. Kabarebe agreed that it was a vital forward step and added that he had known Ambassador Nkulu for years and planned to entertain him in a private dinner that weekend. The Ambassador thanked General Kabarebe for very productive recent visits by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Huddleston and Special Advisor Dr. Wolpe, which evidenced strong USG interest in contributing to regional cooperation on security and other issues. Kabarebe replied that it was important for the U.S. to continue to play a leadership role bringing together security sector and other leaders from the countries of the region. He added that there are many forces that seek to pull the region apart and that it was good to have the U.S. conkbk|Rwanda (FDLR), Kabarebe replied that the operation was essential for the region and that cooperation between the DRC forces and the United Nation's Mission (MONUC) was important.

Kabarebe said he saw no immediate need for GOR forces to join in the operation. They are not in the planning process to do that now, he claimed. He reiterated earlier assurances that the GOR saw the partnership with the DRC as the most important gain in the ongoing effort to defeat the FDLR. Rwanda would only enter the DRC if requested by President Kabila, he stressed, and added that he would again let us know before such a deployment as he did before the January joint offensive.

¶3. (C) Ambassador said that the DRC's public announcement in January that it had requested GOR help was crucial in convincing domestic and international opinion in the DRC that the GOR was not acting unilaterally. Kabarebe agreed and reiterated the comment, frequently repeated here by senior GOR officials, that building the GOR's partnership with the DRC is an essential strategic goal for Rwanda. It depends on increasing the trust between their leaders and publics and is, Kabarebe asserted, more important than short-term tactical advantages. (Comment: The GOR will continue looking for low-profile ways to keep helping the DRC action against the FDLR. Rwanda would very probably send troops to help if requested. However, as long as the DRC and MONUC operation continues to make progress, the prospect of a GOR return is reduced. If the situation changes and the DRC seeks GOR help, we may get an indication of planning for a possible Rwandan deployment together with a signal, perhaps at the last minute, before such an operation began. End Comment.)

¶4. (C) Kabarebe agreed that harm to civilians - from both sides - had to be stopped. When it involved DRC forces, it undercut the operation by fueling opposition. Ambassador noted in passing that he had heard personally from a recent senior USG visitor to the DRC that MONUC strongly debunked a report, widely circulated here, that MONUC officials were

Oreport, widely circulated here, that MONUC officials were facilitating medical care for a top FDLR commander still in the field. Kabarebe acknowledged there were many rumors and it was hard to know which ones were true. In response to a question, Kabarebe agreed that newly-integrated former kinyarwandan speaking Congolese rebels from the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) were very important to the DRC effort against the FDLR. He underscored the importance of maintaining the integration of those forces to the success of the overall mission.

¶5. (C) Ambassador concluded by saying that it was very significant to see the positive reception - both public and private - given to the new DRC Ambassador in Rwanda. Kabarebe agreed, concluding by reiterating the strategic importance of maintaining and increasing the GOR-DRC partnership and by noting his gratitude for continued USG efforts to reinforce that partnership and to find ways to help demonstrate the benefits of that relationship to people in both countries. Finally, he stressed the need to continue efforts to keep the other countries of the region, especially Burundi and Uganda, engaged in positive cooperation on security and economic integration. He warned again that many individuals and forces may seek to undermine the gains made over the past year. (Comment: Kabarebe's call for a continuing USG role appeared to be both personal and

heartfelt. The need for continuing efforts to draw together leaders from the region to overcome past and current tension was underscored this week: Rwanda's popular Kinyarwanda language press, citing the UN experts report, fueled fears that conflict, not cooperation, might lie ahead for the countries of the region. End Comment.)

SYMINGTON